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EDITORIALS

No Bargain

"Any way you look at it, socialized medicine is no bargain and the carpenters want none of it." With those words Mr. William L. Hutcheson, general president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, gave the assembled delegates of the American Medical Association the views of one large and important segment of American labor on the issue of compulsory health insurance. His remarks were made at the December meeting of the American Medical Association in Cleveland and were greeted with loud and prolonged applause by the audience of about five hundred.

To appreciate the magnitude of Mr. Hutcheson's remarks one must recognize his position in American labor circles. First, he is general president of one of the largest and oldest craft unions in the country. With a membership of more than 700,000, the Carpenters and Joiners occupy one of the top brackets in the labor movement. Next, consider that this union is the leader among all construction trades unions in establishing contracts for wages, working conditions and other employment factors; its regular contracts with employers expire earlier in the year than those of the other construction unions and its renewals regularly serve as a pattern for the entire industry.

As to Mr. Hutcheson himself, let it be remembered that he has consistently maintained a top place in union leader circles, both within and without the labor movement. He has often been called into White House conferences on labor matters, even at times when Messrs. Green, Lewis and Murray were

in public disfavor. Known as a sound labor leader with a keen appreciation of labor's responsibilities to the public, Mr. Hutcheson has earned for himself an enviable reputation as an able administrator, a sound analyst of public and economic conditions and a student of legislative and political trends. On top of that, he is noted as a rugged individualist who speaks his mind to any listener, regardless of rank or position. Small wonder that he has been elected to one of the top vice-presidencies of the American Federation of Labor.

Mr. Hutcheson started out his address to the A.M.A. with the flat statement: "I am against socialized medicine." He immediately followed with the fact that his union is likewise opposed to it and pointed to the fact that at the union's annual meeting a few months ago the delegates had voted down a resolution to support "the national health program."

From that start Mr. Hutcheson discussed such items as cost, distribution of medical service and regimentation under government control. Describing carpenters as an independent lot, he stated that "the first bureaucrat who told a carpenter that he had to work in Little Rock when he wanted to work in Lancaster would be gumming his food for lack of teeth."

With that and similar statements the head of the carpenters' union pointed to the community of interest of labor and medicine in opposing "concentration of authority in Washington" and expressed his pleasure in aligning his segment of the labor movement with medicine in this fight.

Medicine is indeed grateful to Mr. Hutcheson for his able and straightforward support. It is even more grateful for the knowledge that the rank and file of labor is not supinely accepting dictation from above, whether that area lies within the labor unions themselves or in bureaucratic circles in the national capital.

In past months many labor leaders have confided their own distrust of compulsory health insurance because of the threat of regimentation that it involves; at the same time they have given lip service to the pronouncements of their national leaders that enactment of health insurance legislation will constitute an indirect increase in wages and therefore be advantageous to their members. The national leaders have also given forth with pronouncements on political candidates and have prepared lists of those to be "purged" because of their support of the

Taft-Hartley Law or other bills adopted by the Congress.

In the November elections the rank and file of labor expressed itself in clear terms at the ballot box; the return of Senator Taft to office by the greatest majority he ever polled is an outstanding example of how the laboring man feels about his representatives in Washington. Similar examples are to be found in many other places.

Now, with a national labor leader coming out flatly against compulsory health insurance, the fundamental belief of labor in opposition to compulsion begins to emerge openly. The community of interest in this direction, with medicine and business, has now been expressed in the clear voice of a man whose own integrity is beyond dispute. Mr. Hutcheson is to be congratulated on his soundness, his courage and his open expression of conviction.

